

Carson River Mercury Site (CRMS)

February 2017 Update

Overview

The CRMS is a legacy of the mining of the Comstock Lode in the 1860's. Mercury was imported from California and added to the ore to amalgamate gold and silver at over 230 mills in the vicinity of historic Virginia City and Washoe Lake. It is estimated that 14,000,000 pounds of mercury were lost to the Carson River drainage, primarily in the form of mercury-contaminated tailings. The tailings also contained elevated levels of arsenic and lead. The CRMS includes mercury-contaminated soils and tailings at former mill sites, mercury contamination in drainages adjacent to the mill sites, and mercury contamination in sediments, fish and wildlife over a more than 80 mile length of the Carson River. The Site covers five counties. Fish in the river and Lahontan Reservoir contain some of the highest levels of mercury detected worldwide. EPA recently distributed the Community Involvement Plan, detailing site issues and outreach methods to use for the affected communities. We have reached out to interested technical and government stakeholders and plan to reach out to additional community groups this February with the results of the Draft Remedial Investigation and Risk Assessment report and publically accessible maps showing the Site's extent using the GeoPlatform System.

Status

Remedial Investigation Report – Operable Unit 2 (River, surface water and biota).

NDEP will receive an advance draft of the RI report and risk assessment on February 1, when EPA completes its two-week review and comment. We will share the draft with our agency counterparts including USGS, USFWS, BLM and USBR, for peer review before finalizing the document by the end of March. EPA and NDEP will conduct outreach with Churchill, Lyon, Storey and Carson City Counties, Fallon Shoshone Paiute and the local cities the weeks of February 6 and 20 explaining the RI, risk assessment and implementation of the Long-term Sampling and Response Plan (LTSRP/OU1). For the RI, our focus is on mercury released from the Empire Mill through to the Terminal Wetlands on the River. EPA included co-located arsenic and lead with mercury, consistent with the source area remedy and so besides mercury uptake in fish, arsenic presents an issue for the risk assessment (naturally occurring and ubiquitous) in surface water and other pathways in the basin.

We expect to scope and award the Feasibility Study (FS) mid 2017 following a brainstorming session sponsored by the Carson River Subconservancy on February 22. The RI evaluated over 30 years of data (more than 25,000 data points) from multiple sources about the areas and pathways of concern, the health impacts needed for a protective remedy and the range of potential remedy alternatives to be evaluated. We will continue to work closely with NDEP, our Federal and local partners and affected communities to inform and involve them in the decision-making process. A Proposed Plan, anticipated in Spring 2019 will serve as the formal opportunity to inform and solicit public input on the eventual proposed remedy. The ROD is planned for 2020 followed by design and remedy implementation in 2021.

Operable Unit 1 (source area soils): A Record of Decision (ROD) was signed for Operable Unit (OU) 1 in 1995 supplemented by the Explanation of Significant Differences (ESD) September 2013. The ROD and ESD establish cleanup standards for mercury, arsenic, and lead in residential soil. We are currently working with NDEP, which has the lead for administration of

the institutional controls for OU1 with funding from our MSCA Grant, to put in place provisions for continued sampling and remediation of residential properties. NDEP will finalize the Long-term Sampling and Response Plan and SAP this January and we will continue to conduct outreach to the five county governments affected by the site to make them aware of the requirements for residential development and soil disturbance within the footprint of the Site. Superfund met with NDEP January 18 to discuss moving forward with offering agency sampling and remediation in the context of the State's match under a new Superfund Contract still to be negotiated.

EPA and NDEP have completed mapping to refine the site boundaries and are set to publish this with the web mapping tool (GeoPlatform/GIS Center). Because many of the millsites are located within the Virginia City Historic District, we will be negotiating a Programmatic Agreement with the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office, in concert with NDEP with respect to soil disturbing activities.

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